



ACT Group

# Practice Framework

We believe every child has the right to feel safe and to **thrive**



# Why do we need a Practice Framework ?

- » A Practice Framework provides an evidence-based structure within which knowledge, learning and good practice can be shared. It gives a common language to communicate across teams that shapes the way they work.
- » It also represents a collaborative approach to working with children, young people, adults and families. It is a reminder of our collective responsibility to ensure we are doing the right things in the right way for the right reasons. As the needs of children, young people, adults and families change and move between different ACTG services, an embedded Practice Framework ensures coherence and consistency in the way we engage and work with them.

A Practice Framework helps to 'centre' our services, ensuring that the different work we do across the organisation is grounded in the same theories, approaches, and values, principles and beliefs. It also articulates to the outside world what it means to be part of ACTG, attracting staff who are interested in the way we work, and have the right outlook and skills to be part of our journey.

Practice Frameworks have been described as merging the **art** and **science** of work with children and families.

- » The **science** represents the evidence base that informs our work.
- » A large part of the **art** is what each individual brings to their work – their values, expertise, experience, and insights are what will bring the ACTG Practice Framework to life, and make a real difference for all our clients.



*ACT Group acknowledges the Ngunnawal, Wurundjeri, and Wadawurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and the contribution they make to the cities of Canberra, Melbourne, and Geelong and the surrounding regions. We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.*

*We also acknowledge the children and young people within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, as they carry the knowledge, traditions, and future hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.*

# What does our Practice Framework focus on?

- 1 **Outcomes**
- 2 **Underpinning Theories & Modalities**
- 3 **Systemic Approaches**
- 4 **Values, Principles & Beliefs**
- 5 **Diversity & Inclusion**



## 1 **Outcomes**

- >> Ensuring strengthened outcomes for our clients are the driving force for the whole ACTG Practice Framework.
- >> They are our shared ambition for children, young people, adults and their families in ACTG and common goals for all those working in or with our service. We believe that every child, has the right to feel safe and thrive.



## 2

# Underpinning Theories & Modalities

A theory or practice modality can be defined as 'a system of ideas intended to explain something'. The six key theories that form the basis of our work are:

- >> **Child development theories**
- >> **Social learning theory**
- >> **Psycho Dynamic Thinking**
- >> **Systems theory**
- >> **Attachment theory**
- >> **Trauma-informed practice**

In seeking to explain human behaviour, these theories help us to understand and support children, young people, adults and families and underpin the approaches and tools we use in our work. They inform, and are informed by, our values, principles and beliefs, and anchor our framework in a shared evidence base.



**Child development theories** are about understanding and appreciating the cognitive, emotional, physical, social and educational growth that children go through from birth and into early adulthood.

**Social learning theory** is based on the premise that people learn from one another through observation and imitation, and that new behaviour will continue if it is reinforced. According to this theory, rather than simply hearing a new concept and applying it, the learning process is made more efficient if the new behaviour is modelled as well.



**Psycho Dynamic Thinking** includes all the theories in psychology that see human functioning based upon the interaction of drives and forces within the person, at times those which are unconscious, and between the different structures of the personality. Psychodynamic thinking helps us to provide a frame with which adults, children, their carers and their helpers can create a space where learning and healing can take place.



**Systems theory** explains human behaviour as the intersection of a variety of factors that work together as a system. An effective system is based on the individual needs, rewards, expectations and attributes of the people living in the system. Therefore families, couples and organisation members are directly involved in resolving a problem even if it is an individual issue.

**Attachment theory** focuses on how children form a bond with their primary caregiver and the influence it has on emotional development, growth into adulthood, and parenthood. The starting point of the theory of attachment is that babies have a biological drive to seek closeness to a protective adult in order to feel safe, secure and protected. Relationships that are warm and attentive create secure attachments. Relationships that are inconsistent, cold or confusing increase levels of anxiety, producing less secure attachments. Attachment theory can be used to understand the quality of relationships that children and adults have with other people, and the effect this has on their development and well-being.



**Trauma - informed Practice** is more than a treatment modality or theory. Trauma informed approaches causes a shift in thinking about how we view people and social problems and can be added to any existing therapy. At its core, it seeks to understand human behaviour, coping mechanisms (both positive and negative), and any problems that result by examining traumatic events throughout life. It aims to understand one's current functioning in light of past events and does not see presenting problems as needing to be fixed, but rather attempts to understand why these problems exist in the first place.

# 3

## Our Systemic Approaches

Our approaches are the way we put our theories, values and beliefs into practice in our direct work with children, young people, adults and families, and through the way that we work with each other. They provide models for us to use to support and create change. Our overarching approach at ACTG is systemic, with a strong understanding on how the system context plays a pivotal role in the life's of our clients.



There are an array of approaches that describe ways of working that guide how we behave as professionals and how our clients experience our interactions with them. They are not processes to follow, or tools in their own right, although within them are a wide range of tools and techniques to support staff in their work. The approaches all emerge from the similar values and evidence base, and are centred around common ideas which allow them to complement each other within an integrated framework:

- >> **Strengths-based**
- >> **Valuing relationships**
- >> **Importance of working with the whole family, including using the family network to build capacity and resilience**
- >> **Centrality of the child or young person's voice and participation**
- >> **Collaborative – doing 'with' not 'to', and seeing families as experts in their own lives**

In other words, ACTG's practice seeks to make sense of the world through relationships, focusing on the whole family system rather than individuals. Through a systemic approach we can achieve change for families by exploring how they interact in relation to others and how their relationship patterns impact on children. Systemic practice enables the expression of different viewpoints and generates multiple hypotheses about what might be happening in a system, such as a family. As such it is an important tool for assessment (including assessment of risk). It also helps to introduce change into a system, creating new explanations and potential solutions for the problems.

## 4 Values, Principles & Beliefs

Our values, beliefs and principles are the core of our Practice Framework and inform both what we do, and the way we do it. The development of our Practice Framework is an opportunity for us to re-connect with and reinvigorate them through reflecting on how they shape our behaviours in the way we work with children, young people, adults and families, and as an organisation. Our values stem from the notions of **fairness**, **respect**, **equality** and **excellence**, and are evident in the way we behave towards the people we work with, our partners and our colleagues.

We asked our clients about their expectations of the values, beliefs and characteristics of clinicians who work with them. They said:

- >> **Invest genuine time with them in a friendly and innovative way;**
- >> **Regular check ins and ensuring boundaries are in place; and**
- >> **Being proactive and making sure the engagement is not just tick a box.**



# 5

## Diversity & Inclusivity

The very nature of therapeutic work is underpinned by the value placed by people on their connections to family, friends and/or the wider community. It is this diversity that is highly respected and embraced by ACTG. People of all ages, stages, backgrounds and abilities are celebrated because the richness of diversity is valued and respected by all staff at ACTG.

Inclusive practice ensures that any child, young person, adult or family receive equal opportunities, despite who they are. Promoting equality and diversity in all ACTG settings is essential for ensuring a therapeutic experience that is accepting, well-rounded, and kind. Adopting inclusive practices is the perfect way to demonstrate to our community that we should all strive towards equality.

All ACTG staff engage in reflection that triggers consideration about practices. We strive to consider each element of every clinical engagement and have 4 cornerstones of this reflection:

- >> **Assess our therapeutic approach**
- >> **Examine our affinities and prejudice**
- >> **Embrace variety**
- >> **Adapt our content to meet our clients needs**



# How do we bring our Practice Framework to life?

**To put it quite simply – our behaviours bring our Practice Framework to life.** Whilst this document sets up the parameters for our practice, it equally needs conscious effort and commitment from all the ACTG team to take it forward.

ACTG has to evolve with our practice, this is through modelling our values, theories and approaches in our practice with all clients, and each other – this is how we bring our Practice Framework to life. Our Practice Framework is intended to be flexible, a guiding tool, one that will inspire ACTG staff, and help us develop. It is a strong foundation of our organisation's commitment to learning, and ensures that opportunities are presented that enable the exploration of theories and approaches to meet the outcomes needed by our clients.

We are committed to listening to our staff through supervision, clinical support activities and training needs, and other feedback opportunities to further understand learning needs and how they can best be met.

## How will we know that our Practice Framework is making a difference?



Feedback from staff and through subsequent consultation are helping to create a baseline from which the ACTG can reflect on the impact that the Practice Framework is having on staff, and their direct work with children, young people, adults, and families.

We will seek feedback on training and learning activities offered as part of the process of embedding the Practice Framework, to understand how it is being used, and where further work is needed.



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